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# A Comparison of Tenth Grade Students' Higher Level Comprehension using Three Approaches: Literal Questions, Reader Response in Journals, and Reader Response in Journals with Team Sharing

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**SUNY COLLEGE AT BROCKPORT**

**A Comparison of Tenth Grade Students' Higher Level  
Comprehension using Three Approaches: Literal Questions,  
Reader Response in Journals, and Reader Response in  
Journals with Team Sharing**

**By  
Nancy Recktenwalt**

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was an increase in higher level comprehension when responding to a piece of literature using: literal questions, reader response in journals that only the teacher read, or reader response in journals that were then shared in student teams. The participants for this study were 70 tenth graders in three different classes in a high school located in Western New York. The classes were all heterogeneous in that they were inclusion classes with students of differing abilities and backgrounds. There were two teachers in the class; an English teacher and a special education teacher. The same two teachers taught all three of the classes. Each class used a different format for responding to the literature. The literature used for this study was the novel To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee. The first class responded to the literature by answering five teacher-made literal questions. The second class responded by writing a response in their journals. The entries were not shared with anyone in the class, except for the teacher. The third class responded by writing a response in their journals and then shared that response with the members in their teams. Each team was made up of four to five students. After completing their responses using their specific format, each class then took the same four-question, higher-level comprehension quiz. Both teachers graded the quizzes using a rubric. The scores were averaged to determine the student's grade. Although the data do not show statistically significant differences between the three approaches, the students who used the reader response format with team sharing received the higher average on the quizzes overall. This shows that the reader response format with team sharing may improve higher level comprehension.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Students' comprehension has always been a major concern. The ability to understand and to think abstractly about a text is imperative for students to achieve. Teachers are constantly looking for ways to improve comprehension. Not only do teachers want students to be life long learners, but also have autonomy with that learning. Understanding leads to autonomy.

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is an increase in higher level comprehension when responding to a piece of literature using:

- literal questions
- reader response in journals that only the teacher reads
- reader response in journals that are then shared in teams.

#### **Questions to be Answered**

1. What is the best way to ensure higher level comprehension when responding to a piece of literature?
2. Is there a difference when students discuss a piece of literature with their peers instead of just receiving comments from their teacher in their journals?

### **Need for the Study**

When students said they didn't like to read, or that they sort of liked to read but couldn't find the time for it, or that they used to read, as children, but had stopped once they got to high school, I didn't know what to say. (Wilson, 1989, p.62)

Many high school students do not discover enjoyment from reading. As educators, we need to encourage that innate passion to read and enjoy it. Our approach to reading in the high school has a direct correlation with how students view reading. In order to make reading more tempting and exciting, the reader response format could be a tool used to increase student motivation to read.

"One of the most important influences on a reader's construction of the meaning of text is his or her prior knowledge of the ideas and experiences described in the text" (Mulcahy-Ernt, 1994, p.326). Many high school students have a variety of differing experiences. It is imperative that they become active learners in the creation of meaning. When students are allowed to grope, wrestle with confusion on their own, they often make surprising discoveries, and there's a special pleasure in that (Wilson, 1989).

Much of the research related to the use of response journals has been conducted in elementary classrooms by teacher-researchers. Several of the studies incorporated reading aloud followed by written response (Hancock, 1993). There are some studies on students in the secondary level, but not as many. Especially in the secondary level,

reader response should be used more often, so that students have the opportunity to construct meaning from the reading selections. Studier (1981) found that typically in the secondary level, emphasis is placed on understanding literature, rather than on active criticism.

If both writing and reading are viewed as constructive process, then writing about reading should provide students with an opportunity to enrich and embellish the meanings they have tentatively constructed, coming to a fuller possession of whatever the text may hold. (Marshall, 1987, p. 31)

This is significant to high school students. As teachers, we want them to learn the classics. Often times exploration with a classic is not allowed, instead teachers guide students to what they should learn from reading the piece of literature. "With the reader an essential part of any literary transaction, the question of how the reader contributes to the creation of meaning becomes an important one" (Galda, 1983, p. 1).

The description of reading is that it is the process of turning selected print cues into an oral language equivalent to retrieve meaning, and it seems reasonable that if children translate print into something more closely resembling their own language, the retrieval of meaning will be accomplished with greater ease." (Stice, 1989, p.137)

The use of reader response with high school students allows them to create meaning through writing. It lets them explore the writing from their own schema. As young adults, they have had a variety of experiences and possess different personalities. This personal style and experience will influence their responses (Galda, 1983). Kelly (1990)



verbalized that one crucial element, especially when dealing with teenagers, is that the reader response model allows students to explore and to determine different interpretations of text depending on what the reader brings to the reading. This gives students the sense of control over their own learning.

There have been many studies that have examined readers' responses to literature, both in and out of school. For the most part, these studies have attempted to isolate facts that might affect the kind of response made to a piece of literature, and they have been relatively successful in determining roles of variables such as age. There has been little, if any work which focuses on the role of writing in determining what students take away from literary texts (Marshall, 1987).

There have been few studies comparing comprehension levels when using reader response as opposed to literal questions. Not only that, but there have not been many studies on the comparison of higher level comprehension when students share their responses as opposed to keeping their entries private for only the teacher to see.

### **Limitations of the Study**

1. The type of genre chosen for the study may not be the best choice for each individual student. This study only shows the results of a novel. The results using poems, short stories, or another genre may produce differences.
2. The type of novel used may not be a typical novel that a student might choose. This may impact the written response of some students because they do not find the novel highly stimulating.
3. The make-up of the class will influence the success rate with reader response. Some classes will be more apt to accept and to embellish the reader response format. A class with many students with intrapersonal personalities may not like the sharing of journal responses.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **What is Reader Response?**

The epitome of reader response is understanding literature from each individual's perspective. According to Many (1991) educators are using a reader response approach in their classrooms in order to offer readers the opportunity of an experience which they can live through and find meaningful in terms of their own ideas, interests, and needs. Literature-based reading and whole language programs strongly encourage children to respond to literature they read through writing (Hancock, 1992). That is the focus of reader response. The student creates meaning by using his/her prior knowledge and the literature together. Mayher and Lester (as cited in Wollman-Bonilla, 1989) feel that in order to grow as readers, children must learn to use their own knowledge, experiences, and emotions to construct personal meaning and develop a sense of text ownership.

The basis for reader response is that the student interacts with the meaning of the text more when using a written response, usually in the form of some type of journal writing. Bauso (as cited in Hancock, 1992) found that the literature response journal provides an effective means of linking writing with the active reading process. Writing a response to a piece of literature instead of just answering questions allows readers to

express what they know, rather than what they do not know.

Flitterman-King (as cited in Hancock, 1993) describes a literature response journal as “a repository for wanderings and wonderings, speculations, questionings...a place to explore thoughts, discover reactions, let the mind ramble..a place to make room for the unexpected” (p. 466). The use of journals not only provides freedom to focus on the expression of personal thoughts, but it also elevates reading to an active process of meaning-making (Hancock, 1993).

Students are most comfortable with and work most effectively in situations which make sense to them. Tchudi (1985) found that her daughter’s experiences with literature were a piece of her experiences with life; literature was more of an extension and a reflection of direct experience of living. It was not merely an artifact to be studied or a mere pastime. Literature is a tool in which life’s lessons are taught. Why are students not becoming active learners of life’s lessons instead of passive learners?

### **Types Of Reader Response**

Within the realm of reader response there are many different approaches. The beauty of it is that teachers can adapt it to their own students. One form is dialogue journals, in which the teacher writes back to the students. Another form is where students respond to a piece in their journals and then read their response to the teacher (Wollman-Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1995). Students may also write in their journals and

share them with a peer. Not only are there different formats to responding, there are also different stances students may take.

Some of the stances are moral, gender, or spiritual to just mention a few.

Edwards (1991) used journals in a dialectical format. This is where students write what the text says, then what it means and finally, what it means to them. It is almost as if the student is having a discussion with himself/herself. Only a few methods have been discussed; there are many different modes to reader response. Again, it is up to the individual teacher to determine what is appropriate for his/her students.

When using reader response journals, it is imperative to explain to the students about how the journals will be utilized. Students may write some confidential information and may not feel comfortable about sharing it. They need to be aware of what audience they will be sharing it with, if any. Typically, spelling and punctuation are not counted. The informal journal response format serves as an appropriate method for capturing emerging reader response while effectively linking writing with the reading process (Hancock, 1993). Students should be focusing on making meaning of a text instead of the mechanics of their writing. Wollman-Bonilla (1989) conclude that journals invite children to use expressive language that is addressed to oneself or a trusted reader and is informal and conversational in tone.

## **History of Reader Response**

“As early as 1929, Richards used the term response to discuss the appropriateness of students’ reactions to literary experiences” (Cothorn, 1993, p.1). The New Criticism believed that the only appropriate response to a literary work was the one most commonly reported. They fathomed that divergence in response was just inaccurate and the reader has just misread the text. The reader response format allows students to create meaning through their own interpretation, even it is different from the commonly reported meaning.

Many teachers use journals as a tool for student writing. This technique which typically is a daily writing assignment gained popularity in the mid-70’s and is still widely used. There are three primary approaches to journal writing. The first of these is the “anything goes” approach. Students write about what they want to for about ten minutes. Students sometimes become frustrated because they run out of things to write about. The second approach is when the teacher places a quote or motto (some kind of statement) on the board and has students write about it in their journals. Students sometimes feel pressure with this approach and find that they have difficulty relating to the statement within a set time. The third approach is using topics that grow out of the class concern. This may be individualistic and lets students explore (Simmons, 1989). The use of journals may be declining due to the increase in state tests and the changes made within those tests.

Most of elementary school children's experiences with literature in schools today are in the inquisition mode. Most of the basal series provide students with stories, and then the teachers are given questions that correlate with the stories. The children may gather together and discuss the story, but the discussion usually consists of the teacher asking the questions and the children attempting to answer them. Their comprehension of the story is judged by how closely their answers match those in the textbook. This reflects what Louise Rosenblatt has called efferent reading. Efferent reading is what a person can take away and use- perhaps to pass a test. In contrast to efferent reading Rosenblatt has describes what she calls aesthetic reading. Aesthetic reading transpires when "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (as cited in Eeds & Wells, 1989, p.5). Through her view, reading is transaction- both bringing to and taking meaning from a text.

Louise Rosenblatt is considered the mother of Reader Response. Her transactional theory of reader response supports the expression of personal thoughts, strong emotions, real-life connections, and idiosyncratic meaning making during encounters with literature.

Rosenblatt's quest for the aesthetic response to literature is sustained through a journal format that encourages personal connections with literature. Written response to literature is a powerful means of preserving those special transactions with books that make reading a rewarding, personal experience. (Hancock, 1993, p 467)

According to Wilson (1989, p. 67) "readers often change their minds in the course of a reading, but students in school often think they're not supposed to; they figure they should form opinions early and stick to them". The use of reader response journals seems to give students permission to tell the truth about their changing opinions.

### **Why Reader Response Works.**

Reader response has numerous benefits and is an extremely valuable tool. Students who use journals exhibited thinking that ranged from literal, text based observations and questions to more cognitively complex evaluative judgments. Students' responses are cognitively more complex when they create meaning through reader response (Mulcahy-Ernt, 1994). Children have an innate desire to share. "Much of the spontaneous sharing of 'discoveries,' both child to child and child to adult, began with cues for gaining another's attention: 'Look at this!' or 'Listen to this!' or nonverbal equivalents like poking and pointing and beckoning" (Hickman, 1981, p.346). Some of these encounters then turned into formulated response statements. Sometimes it is not the desire to talk about a piece of literature that is at the heart of it, but the re-experience of it, and the personal response affirmation provided by another person.



Reader response provides an opportunity few students sometimes experience.

The standard lit essay, with its thesis statement and carefully outlined development, provides little room for such response; class discussion, often dominated by a few articulate students, can be intimidating to all but the most confident. Shy students, students unsure of their opinions, students easily embarrassed in public, students with images to protect may find it difficult to admit, in class, to emotions inspired by reading a book. (Wilson, 1989, p.68)

Students may find it easier to talk to themselves in their reading logs, knowing that they will only be shared with the teacher or a few select peers. Reading logs lead students to think, talk, become excited about literature, and helps them to want more (Wilson, 1989). They act as leaders in their own exploration of a piece of literature.

Why does reader response benefit the student more than answering questions? Wilson (1989) finds that students who keep reading logs, do on their own what their teachers have urged them to do. The students ask questions, make predictions, form opinions, reread the text to find evidence to support their opinions, and notice subtleties of the author's wit. "Textbook questions do not ask students to reflect on their learning, make connections to their own lives, pose and solve problems, or critically evaluate what they read" (Mulcahy-Ernt, 1994, p.336). When students respond to questions, they seldom move beyond the parameters of the question to explore new ground. When they do, the teacher does not follow their lead. The pace and direction of the discussion are the

teacher's control (Marshall, 1987).

Mulcahy-Ernt (1994) conducted research comparing direct questioning and student-directed self-questioning through dialogue journals. She was trying to determine which helps the reader develop a fuller understanding of the literary text. She found that the students in the experimental group rarely dealt with facts already known; instead they asked questions about text they found difficult to interpret and speculated about meaning. The textbook questions do not ask students to reflect on their learning, make connections to their own lives, pose and solve problems, or critically evaluate what they read. "Expressive journal writing not only offers a platform for cognitive complexity, but also allows for individual differences in comprehension development" (Mulcahy-Ernt, 1994, p.325).

It has been found that students' comprehension is expanded when they use a reader response form. According to Barone (1990), who completed a study with young children responding to literary text using dialogue journals, the level of comprehension increased when using reader response. The students would write letters to the teacher, and then the teacher in turn would write a response to their writing. Barone reported that at the beginning of a new text the children generally wrote about the explicit elements of the story. Initially, the students appeared to be sorting out the characters and determining the main plot. "As they continued to respond, their writing became interpretive, often blending their personal experiences with the events of the story. These interpretive

responses indicated their grappling with an understanding of the text that involved more than literal comprehension" (Barone, 1990, p. 55).

Wilson (1989) has conducted research on eleventh grade students using the reader response format. She found that after initial puzzlement, readers often refine their questions, return to the text for clues, and reread a passage, page, or chapter. When students read to answer their own questions, they pay closer attention to the literature, often noticing words or images that the teacher might never have thought to point out. Too often we assume, as adults, that children's responses are the same as ours, unless they ask questions or show some signs of confusion (Tchudi, 1985). In actuality they are very different and may have a different interpretation. Often times different interpretations are typically looked down upon and the student is told he/she is wrong. Mulcahy-Ernt (1994) believes that often readers lack confidence in their ability to answer text based questions because their answers do not match the book.

The use of journals in the form of reader response is not only beneficial to students, but to teachers as well. "First of all, peer influence is at a minimum, so children's responses are likely to be more individual, more personal than their oral responses might be. Second, written responses are permanent; the teacher may study them carefully and refer to them at any time" (Studier, 1981, p. 426). Teachers are able to see the students' growth and are able to look at what writing skills/areas need work. The use of journals also increases the personal relationship between the student and the teacher. The teacher becomes better

acquainted with each individual student when using journals because they are very personal and allow the student to express himself/herself the way they feel comfortable.

### **The Role of the Teacher/Classroom Environment**

The classroom environment and the classroom teacher are both vital components to a successful reader response program. "The teacher serves as a catalyst for encouraging exploration of the suggested avenues for responses. Striving to awaken new modes of response within the reader is the responsibility of the teacher in the role of facilitator and response guide" (Hancock, 1993, p. 470).

Teachers need not only to be knowledgeable about reader response, but they must also be willing to make some changes. The teacher's role is shifted from the leader to the moderator or facilitator. Knowledge of a wide variety of differing response styles is also important for a teacher in order for her/him to assist students in developing a response that fits the individual. Teachers also need to be aware how easily they are able to influence students. Teacher comments are very influential to students. "Teacher comments should be nonjudgmental, encouraging, and thought provoking. The ultimate goal is to inspire deeper thought on the art of the student" (Hancock, 1993, p.471).

Various expressions of response were either permitted or facilitated by or generated by the climate of the school and the classroom. Thus the teacher has direct role in the classroom environment. Writing and oral

language should be encouraged and valued, with considerable freedom. There seems to be a positive atmosphere and perception of literature: books are central to the school experience, and they are meant to be enjoyed. Among the books, the ones that seemed to generate the most talk and the greatest variety of response events were those that the teacher had introduced or read to the group. "The fact that a book had claimed the teacher's attention gave it in a sense a special sanction which apparently encouraged some children to pursue it" (Hickman, 1981, p.353).

### **Why Use Reader Response with High School Students?**

"Maturity, then, is one variable that influences whether the focus is on the picture, on the language, or on the reaction of the readers to those elements" (Tchudi, 1985, p.465). As students become older they develop the ability to look beyond the printed words. Older readers are more likely to abstract about texts than younger readers. High school students should have more of an opportunity to use reader response because they are able to look past immediate surface feelings or physical behaviors to conceptions of characters in terms of long-range social or psychological beliefs and goals (Beach & Wendler, 1987). Students' ability to generalize or interpret becomes more adept as they mature.

As children mature, they become less egocentric, especially during middle and late adolescence. They begin to adapt at inferring or adopting other person's thoughts or perceptions. This is an area that younger

children have had difficulty. Also as they mature, their own language and their own values emerge and develop. Especially at the high school level, students are trying to find their identity. The reader response format encourages and promotes that growth through literature.

During adolescence, students are full of energy and need outlets. We as humans are innately social creatures. It is amazing to think that students at the high school level are able to sit and pay attention while the teacher is discussing a story for forty-five minutes or longer. Experiencing literature as part of social interaction is the root of response (Tchudi, 1985).

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Design of Study**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is an increase in higher level comprehension when responding to a piece of literature using:

- literal questions
- reader response in journals that only the teacher reads
- reader response in journals that are then shared in teams.

**Null Hypothesis:** There is no statistical significant difference among the mean scores of the three different groups of students as measured by a series of ten examiner-developed quizzes.

#### **Methodology**

##### **Subjects:**

The participants for this study were 70 tenth graders in three different classes in a high school located in Western New York. The classes were all heterogeneous in that they were inclusion classes with students of differing abilities and backgrounds. The first class had 25 students, seven of whom were classified with a disability. The second class had 22 students, seven of whom were classified with a disability. The third class has 23 students, seven of whom were classified. There were two teachers in the classroom; an English teacher and a special education teacher. The same two teachers taught all three of the classes

used in this study. The students used journals in the past but had not been taught the reader response stances. The students had not seen a model of a reader response entry. Each student already had a journal that stayed in the classroom. That is the journal that was used for the reader response and also for the questions to the text.

**Materials:**

The novel To Kill a Mockingbird was the piece of literature used for this study. This novel has many prominent issues in it, such as courage, wisdom, perseverance, and prejudice. The novel is set in a Southern small rural town. Scout as a older woman reflecting on her life as a young girl acts as the narrator. Her daddy, Atticus, was a prominent lawyer in the town. He was given a case to defend an African American. It was a case many did not want, but that Atticus looked to with good intentions.

The two teachers created five questions for the students in the literal group to respond to after the reading. The questions checked students' basic understanding of the material and covered mostly literal information, e.g. What did Cal say to Scout about company?

The two teachers also created a four-question, higher-level comprehension quiz which all three groups took after they responded to the portion of literature read according to their class format. A quiz was created for each response session (See Appendix A). This questioned students on their higher level understanding of the story. This was graded using a rubric with 5 levels (See Appendix B).



**Procedure:**

Each class was given a different format for responding to the literature.

- One class responded to the literature by answering the five teacher-made literal questions.
- Another class responded by writing a response in their journals. The entries were not shared with anyone in the class, except for the teacher. The teacher then wrote a positive comment back to the student.
- The third class responded by writing a response in their journals and then shared that response with the members in their teams. Each team was made up of four to five students.

All three groups then answered the four short-answer, higher-level comprehension questions about the literature.

All the classes read a chapter of the novel aloud with the students taking roles. Then the students immediately responded to the portion read according to their class format. The classes that used the reader response had that format modeled for them. They also practiced as a class in order for the response format to be in place.

The students would also be assigned one or two chapters to read for homework. When the students arrived in class they would some times read a chapter aloud or they would start class with the reader response

format. The students would respond according to their format based on two or three chapters. The first group would answer questions from all of the chapters. The second and third group would have a series of questions to help them remember what happened in the chapters. Students were allowed to use their books during this time. After each class completed its response, the students took a short-answer, four-question, higher-level comprehension quiz. The class that was sharing its responses in teams shared first within its teams and then took the quiz.

The two classes using reader response were taught two types of responses during the reading of the novel. They were taught the association (memory) response and the literary importance response. Using an association response (memory), the students responded to a piece of literature relating their own personal experiences, e.g. this story reminds me of... The literary importance response is when the student responded by discussing topics such as the most important passage or the most important feature. The students chose which response format they wanted to use.

The three groups completed this process for about a month. They responded following the format described above for ten response sessions. This allowed for ten quizzes of seventy-three students to be compared.

### **Analysis of Data**

The students' four-question higher-level comprehension quizzes were graded out of twenty points based upon the level of comprehension displayed. The papers were graded by both teachers in order to increase the validity of the quiz. The quizzes were graded using a rubric of twenty points (See Appendix A). Each question was worth five points. A student was able to earn anywhere from a one to five on each question depending on the level of comprehension shown. The two teachers used a rubric to grade each quiz. A five represented the highest level of comprehension and a one represented the lowest level of comprehension. The teachers graded the quizzes separately and then convened. If the score on a question was more than one point difference a third party was used to grade the essay. If there was a one point difference, the grade was averaged. For example, if one examiner gave a grade of 4 and the other examiner gave a grade of 5, the student received a 4.5 on that question. The total points were calculated by adding the points for each question. The researcher then compared the grades on the quizzes for each group. This helped to determine which of the three methods increased students' higher level comprehension. The means were compared using an analysis of variance.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Analysis of the Data**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is an increase in higher level comprehension when responding to literature using

- literal questions
- reader response in journals that only the teacher reads
- reader response in journals that are then shared in teams

#### **Analysis of the Findings**

The following null hypothesis was investigated in this study.

**Null Hypothesis:** There is no statistically significant difference among the mean test scores in higher level reading comprehension of tenth grade students who responded to literature using the three different approaches.

In the first approach, the students answered five literal questions about the chapters read. In the second approach, the students answered open-ended questions in a journal. These responses were not shared with anyone but the teacher. In the third approach, the students answered open-ended questions in a journal. Then they would share those responses with the students in their team by reading them aloud and discussing.

## **Findings**

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Each Group

<b>Group Number</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Group 1	16.17	1.19
Group 2	16.56	1.745
Group 3	16.74	1.014

As indicated by the results of the higher level reading comprehension quizzes, the mean raw score for the first group who only answered literal questions was 16.17 with a standard deviation of 1.19. The second group who responding to literature by writing a private journal response achieved the mean raw score of 16.56 with a standard deviation 1.75. The third group who responded in their journals and then shared had a mean raw score of 16.78 with a standard deviation of 1.01. A chart comparing all three approaches can be found in Appendix C.

An analysis of variance was computed using the mean scores from the ten quizzes for all three groups. The data were analyzed using a 0.05 level of significance to determine whether the differences among the mean quiz score of Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3 was statistically significant. These data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Data from Anova Single Factor

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Column 1	10	161.74	16.174	1.420249
Column 2	10	165.6	16.56	3.045867
Column 3	10	167.38	16.738	1.028996

ANOVA						
<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between G	1.662587	2	0.831293	0.453836	0.639944	3.354131
Within Gro	49.456	27	1.831704			
Total	51.11859	29				

The  $F$  value was calculated to be 0.45. The calculated  $F$ -critical value was computed as 3.35. The calculated  $F$ -Value was less than the  $F$ -critical value, therefore the null hypothesis is not rejected. There was no evidence of a statistically significant difference among the three groups.

### **Interpretation of the Data**

This study was created to determine whether the use of journals to respond to literature and the sharing of those journals help students improve their higher level comprehension. An analysis of the data of this study indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference among the mean test scores of the three different groups. The null hypothesis was not rejected. This implies that none of the methods were

superior to the other based solely on analysis of the data. When studying the mean scores, there appears to have been a slight difference. The first group that used literal questions had the lowest mean. The second group, who used the reader response format in their journals but did not share it had the second highest mean. The highest mean was acquired by group three that used the reader response format in their journals and then shared within their teams. The evidence from this study supports the use of journals using a reader response format as at least equal to other approaches. The higher scores (while not statistically significant) show that not only having students write in those journals, but also share and discuss with their peers may increase their higher level comprehension.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Conclusions and Implications**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is an increase in higher level comprehension when responding to literature using

- literal questions
- reader response in journals that only the teacher reads
- reader response in journals that are then shared in teams

#### **Conclusions**

Analysis of the data indicates that there was not a statistically significant difference among the mean quiz scores of the three groups. This shows that none of the methods proved statistically to be a better approach to use. When analyzing the mean quiz scores, the group that used the reader response format with team sharing had the highest mean. The means may not show too much difference, but informal observations in addition to the quizzes displayed a differentiation between the groups.

There were certain factors which may have had an effect on this study. One factor was the students' attitudes toward writing. Some of the students were leery of completing an analysis in their journal because it meant that they had to write. Some students struggled with getting their ideas down on paper, which caused them to have less developed responses. If students struggle with spelling or writing at the secondary



level, they are leery of engaging in a writing task. Most of the students were able to get past this and developed thorough journal entries. This did impact some of the students and their responses were shorter and not as developed. The two groups who used the reader response format were given four open-ended questions. The broad questions helped the students have a focus, yet also gave them the freedom to discuss what they thought was important.

Another factor was carrying out the reader response format. The teacher/researcher was absent one day when the students were completing their journal responses and their team sharing which may have had an effect on the results of that quiz. It was difficult for a substitute to carry out and facilitate the reader response format. This may have impacted the students' scores.

There were other differences than just the mean scores on the quizzes in the three approaches. The students' progress was different for each approach. The students who answered the literal questions did not discuss higher level concepts. They merely discussed what events took place in the chapter. They did not have many conversations about why these events took place or how they personally felt about it.

The students in the second group who did not share with their team seemed to want to discuss the chapters. It was natural for them to want to discuss their thoughts and feelings. One study found when children engage in partner reading they often would stop and talk to each other (Keifer, 1983). This is just a natural tendency in the culture in which we

live.

The third group who did share their journal responses seemed hesitant at first. Especially at the secondary level, the opinions of their peers are very important. Once the students practiced a few times, they were more comfortable. They may have become more and more comfortable with the reader response format the longer it was used. It would become a more natural process if the reader response format was carried out throughout the entire year. Keifer (1983) recognizes the importance of time in the development of a response. Students need days and weeks in order to react fully to a work of literature.

The students in the third group were more apt than the other groups to share their feelings about the events that took place and the teams would discuss why the events took place. Their conversations were not about trivial issues, but they were able to grasp the essence of what Harper Lee was trying to convey. It has been found within reader response, students have a tendency to ask and answer their own questions (Cox & Many, 1992). This was very apparent when observing the third group. They felt more comfortable asking their peers in a small group as opposed to the whole class.

As the students' quizzes were viewed more closely, it was interesting to see that the students who did not use the reader response typically lost points on the Development and Analysis section of the rubric (See Appendix). The students who used the reader response format in their journals and then shared in their teams typically lost points for story

knowledge. This shows that the students were able to analyze more closely using the reader response format if they had read. The piece of literature was analyzed more closely when students were given the opportunity to write about it and then discuss it.

### **Implications for Research**

Further research into reader response is needed. One reason is the diversity in the way it is used. Though the data do not prove the effectiveness of reader response, they do show that it is another means for students to understand literature. The mean scores were all very close. It would have been interesting to complete this research using a longer time frame.

There also needs to be more research on reader response at the secondary level. It has enormous capacity as a tool for teachers. At this level it is important for students to analyze literature and discuss with their peers. The way reader response is used at the secondary level should be studied to determine the most successful method.

The type of genre used also has implications. Galda (1982) has completed extensive research and has come to the conclusion that the context and genre affect the response. The students responded only to a novel. It would be beneficial to complete research with different genre. Students may react differently to different forms of literature. In addition, the type of class also is a factor in how successful the reader response format works with a class.

It would have been interesting to look for patterns within the students' responses. According to Golden and Guthrie (1986), patterns of response may provide insights into the text features that guide response and the reader-based factors that were shared by the readers. I am curious about how the different students responded.

The reader response format with team sharing did have the highest mean score. This proves that the reader response format does not negatively affect students. It can be used to help students discover the meaning instead of having the teacher probe for the correct response. It would have been interesting to determine if the reader response format helps students with their analyzing confidence and/or if it improved their sense of autonomy.

Completing the reader response format for a reading during the class when it is fresh in students' minds may have been a better approach. For this research, the students were assigned chapters for homework. Some of the students did not read and therefore did poorly on the quizzes. This tainted some of the data because it was not an accurate score of the effectiveness of the reader response format. This approach may have worked better if the students read it in class and the material was fresh when they completed the reader response.

A more intensive study using different levels of students may reveal diverse responses. It would be interesting to determine what method is most effective for each level. Working with teens makes it difficult for them to speak openly about their ideas because they are still building their

identity, in turn their confidence. The length of the research could be longer so that the students become comfortable enough to share their feelings without fear of being ridiculed.

### **Implications for Classroom Practices**

Research supports the use of reader response in classrooms. Again, the format and the way it is carried out is unique to the teacher. It is beneficial for the students to discover their own learning. Reader response allows them to lead their own discoveries. The reader response format may not increase test scores, but it does increase student learning.

The reader response format allows students to work with their peers to determine the meaning of literature. It also takes away the teacher "knows all" element. Students have different experiences and views which in turn impact their interpretation of the literature. It is important for teenagers to see that there is not always one meaning for a piece of literature. The reader response format allows students to intellectually challenge themselves. Again, it is important to remember that the teacher does play a role.

I enjoyed watching the different reactions from the students and having them share those responses with their peers. All the students are at different cognitive levels and this played a role in their interpretation of the text. Depending on the students' level, they can perceive the same situation in highly dissimilar ways (Hynds, 1985). This in turn would be displayed through their writing.

Based on informal observations, the students grew as a class more when using the reader response format. Working in teams allowed them to interact and discover together. Each student had a different twist or interpretation which was discussed. The students' feelings were validated because they were in such a small group and were not afraid to share their ideas. If the whole class would discuss a piece of literature, only the students who are very confident in their answers are willing to share their interpretations.

The reader response format brought students closer together. They would laugh and question each other. The students were all actively involved instead of just sitting and listening to a discussion. Overall, the positive benefits of reader response make it an extremely useful tool with numerous possibilities.

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## **Appendix A**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
To Kill A Mockingbird Quiz Chap. 9-11

English 2  
Recktenwalt/Casement

1. What lesson does Uncle Jack learn from Scout? Why is he so upset with what Francis said to Scout?

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2. Why does Atticus keep his talent hidden from the children? How does this change the way the children look at him?

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3. Why does Atticus want Scout to hear what he is saying to Uncle Jack? Why is Atticus worried about the children catching "Maycomb's usual disease?"

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4. Why is it unlike Jem to act out towards Mrs. Dubose's comment? Why does he commit the wrong doing towards Mrs. Dubose? Why does Atticus give him the consequence he does?

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## **Appendix B**

## Rubric

	5	4	3	2	1
ture	in-depth analysis of the literature	thorough analysis of the literature	basic analysis of the literature	confused analysis	no evidence of analysis
ions	insightful connections with literature and its meaning	clear connections with lit. and its meaning	implicit connections with lit. & meaning	few or superficial connections with lit & meaning	no connections with literature & meaning
ment	develops ideas clearly & fully	develops ideas clearly & consistently	develops some ideas more fully than others	develops ideas briefly	no evidence of development
dge	response indicates complete recall of all impertinent story details	response indicates mostly complete recall of story details	response indicates some recall of story details	response indicates little recall of story details	response indicates no recall of story details

NR IC


## **Appendix C**

# Comparisons of Response Style & Comprehension

